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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 002725

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2014

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM YM HUMAN RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC REFORM](#)

SUBJECT: YEMENI OPPOSITION JOURNALIST REMAINS IN DETENTION

REF: A. SANAA 02498

[1](#)B. SANAA 02501

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. Despite mounting pressure on the ROYG to release opposition newspaper editor Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani, he remains in prison. The local press reported that the ROYG offered Khaiwani freedom in exchange for an apology for publishing articles that the ROYG considers personal attacks on President Saleh. Khaiwani publicly refused to back down although government officials deny any such offer is on the table. End Summary.

ROYG to Khaiwani Say Sorry?

[1](#)2. (SBU) The local press alleges that the ROYG offered to release imprisoned opposition newspaper editor Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani if he resigns as editor of as-Shura newspaper and apologizes to the government. Khaiwani has been imprisoned since his September 5 conviction for several violations of the Yemeni Press Law including "supporting al-Houthi in his rebellion," publishing reports damaging to the public interests, and "public humiliation" of the President. (Ref A.) Attorneys for Khaiwani contend that the ROYG is attempting to resolve the matter in "traditional Yemeni fashion" by using family, party members, and alternative interlocutors.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Khaiwani associates report that he was visited in prison by a well-dressed and unnamed representative from the "President's office" offering to release him in exchange for a public apology and his resignation. Khaiwani remains defiant, stating publicly that he has no intention of complying with the governments wishes. ROYG officials deny such an offer was made.

Pressure Mounting

[1](#)4. (SBU) Since Khaiwani's arrest, pressure on the ROYG is intensifying. Several newspapers have dedicated entire issues to the case, and international organizations, including the United Nations International Federation for Human Rights and the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, have petitioned the ROYG for his release. Domestically, opposition parties have held numerous meetings to discuss the matter and Parliament's Committee for Culture and Information has opened its own investigation. Journalists report that they hope to plan a protest march to the President's house in the near future.

[1](#)5. (C) According to an official at the Ministry of Human Rights, HR Minister as-Soswah has discussed the Khaiwani case with President Saleh on more than one occasion pressing him to resolve it. Other members of the Cabinet, however, have expressed disagreement with the arrest but refuse to weigh in. (Ref B.)

We want cartoons!

[1](#)6. (SBU) Opposition and independent journalists now consider Khaiwani's case a symbol of their struggle for press freedoms. Journalists admit they are pushing the envelope by crossing traditional red lines, but note that the time has come to expand freedom of the press in Yemen. One journalist commented that although the Khaiwani case may cause some in the media to increase self-censorship, it has also served to give hope to a growing circle of Yemeni journalists. "Our dream," he said, "is to publish political cartoons of President Saleh in the near future."

[1](#)7. (C) Comment. Some ROYG insiders believe that the President may have acted rashly to quell criticisms of his actions during the sensitive time of the al-Houthi insurgency. One MFA official confided that Khaiwani would never been arrested if Presidential Advisor Dr. Iryani, ill at the time, had been by Saleh's side to "calm him down."

The ROYG now finds itself in a difficult position. Currently convicted under the Press Law, releasing Khaiwani in exchange for an apology is tantamount to admission that the judicial system is an afterthought of the Executive. However, continuing to hold him emboldens the opposition and presents the media with a potent symbol in its fight to expand press freedoms. A solution to the ROYG's dilemma may be a "Ramadan Reprieve" for Khaiwani. End Comment.

KRAJESKI